



National Park Service
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Grand Teton
National Park

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Grand Teton National Park News Release

Rangers Evacuate Injured Horseback Riders by Helicopter from Granite Canyon in Grand Teton National Park

Grand Teton National Park rangers and an interagency contract helicopter evacuated two injured horseback riders from Granite Canyon on Monday, August 7 at approximately 4:00 p.m. Ruth Artzt and Sam Harrell, both age 75, of Wilson, Wyoming, were out for a horseback ride when they were bucked off their horses about noon on Monday. The two had decided to eat lunch on their horses, which were standing next to each other; however, when Artzt spilled water on her horse, both horses spooked and bucked the two riders off. Artzt and Harrell each sustained injuries that prevented them from proceeding further. Harrell was able to place a 911 cell phone call at 12:30 p.m., which was forwarded to Teton Interagency Dispatch Center. He requested emergency assistance and stated that he and Artzt were near the Granite Canyon creek.

Rangers immediately began to coordinate an emergency response. Since the party was unable to identify their precise location, rangers utilized the interagency contract helicopter to perform an aerial reconnaissance. Rangers also dispatched rescue teams to begin hiking to the accident scene. Spotters in the helicopter located the injured parties at about 1:15 p.m. near the junction of the Granite Canyon and Valley trails, 1.6 miles from the Granite Canyon trailhead. The helicopter landed in a nearby meadow and dropped off two rangers, who ran to the accident site. The ship then flew to the Teton Interagency Helibase at the Jackson Hole Airport to stage for a possible helicopter evacuation.

After reaching the injured parties, rangers assessed the patients' conditions and provided emergency medical assistance. Harrell was experiencing serious respiratory difficulties, and his condition was deteriorating quickly. Artzt had sustained multiple abrasions and was experiencing back pain.

Due to Harrell's life-threatening injuries and the need to keep both patients immobile during transport, rangers opted to use the helicopter to short-haul the patients rather than conduct a wheeled litter evacuation. The short-haul technique – a method by which rangers fly, individually or in pairs, suspended from the helicopter on a double-rope system – allows the helicopter to insert rangers into, or extricate patients from, terrain where a helicopter cannot land. In this case, the need for the patients to be recumbent and the presence of intermittent storm cells in the area contributed to the decision to use this efficient method of evacuation. Rangers at the scene stabilized the patients for transport and loaded each patient into a rescue litter. The helicopter then short-hauled Harrell and Artzt, one at a time, to the helibase. A ranger flew below the helicopter, attached to the litter and attending each patient during the flights. From the helibase, park ambulances transported the patients to St. John's Medical Center in Jackson.

This was the eighteenth major search and rescue operation in Grand Teton National Park this year.

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